

Herald News, North Jersey Media Group (Passaic County, NJ): MONEY

Driving today takes a toll on the environment and wallets, yet many workplaces are in suburbs where cars are crucial. However, some companies are realizing that there are ways to get their workers out of the driver's seat - and that there are benefits to doing so.

As part of a new national program that encourages businesses to provide incentives for employees who carpool or use public transportation, the Federal Reserve Bank of New York's East Rutherford office was named one of the **20 Best Workplaces for Commuters in New Jersey** by the state Department of Transportation and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Last month, the Fed was recommended for recognition by Meadowlink, a regional nonprofit made up of public and private transportation organizations including the state Department of Transportation, NJ Transit, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, and the Meadowlands Commission.

All companies that are designated as a "best workplace for commuters" must meet the EPA's National Standard of Excellence, which requires employers to offer benefits such as a monthly subsidy for public transportation, cash in lieu of free parking, lockers or showers for bikers or walkers, or onsite daycare or dry cleaning.

The bank's East Rutherford site worked closely with Meadowlink to provide a shuttle service from Journal Square in Jersey City to its office on Orchard Street.

As part of the program, the bank pays part of the cost of bus tickets for employees. It also guarantees a shuttle ride home for commuters if, for example, a carpooling co-worker needs to stay at work late.

Meadowlink emerged in the early 1980s during the national fuel crisis, said Krishna Murthy, the group's executive director. Then, as more businesses were relocating from New York City to New Jersey, the nonprofit helped commuters deal with suburban sprawl, she added.

In the early 1990s, the short-lived Employee Trip Reduction Program required companies with more than 100 employees to reduce the number of cars coming to the workplace by 20 percent.

"Whether it's suburban sprawl ... or back now to the gas crisis, the problem is the same: how do you get people back to work?" Murthy said.

Other workplaces that received recognition include Verizon in Newark and United Parcel Service in Secaucus.